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THE

NATURE and EFFECTS OF Superstition. IN A SERMON

Preached before the Honourable

House of Commons,

ON

Saturday, the Fifth of *November*, 1692.

By *THOMAS MANNINGHAM*, D. D. and Chaplain in Ordinary to Their Majesties.

LONDON,

Printed by *Thomas Braddyll* and *Robert Everingham*, and are to be Sold at the *Seven Stars* in *Ave-Mary-Lane*, MDCXCII.

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Acts XVII. 22.

Then Paul *ſtood in the midſt of Marſ-Hill and ſaid, ye Men of Athens, I percieve that in all things ye are too Superſtitious.*

THIS is the beginning of that moſt wiſe and excellent Speech, which St. *Paul* made in the great Court of *Athens*, where many of the Philoſophers and Learned Men of *Greece* where Aſſembled to gratifie their Curioſity, and to hear what that *New Doctrine* was, which he ſeemed ſo deſirous of Publiſhing amongſt them. When St. *Paul* talk'd ſo much of *Jeſus* and the *Reſurrection*, they

took him to be a ſetter-forth of New Gods, and one who came to increaſe the Superſtition of the Vulgar; for we cannot well conceive that all the Philoſophers of that Age, eſpecially the *Epicureans*, which was the moſt prevailing Sect at that Time, had any great Opinion of thoſe Devotions and Ways of Worſhip, of which the Common People were ſo Zealous: However, they expected ſomething that was new, ſomething that might entertain their Inquiſitive Minds, and give ſome Diverſion to their Wit and Parts.

The Religion of the great Men of that Age was wholly turn'd into curious Diſputes, into elegant Diſcourſes, and a Gentile Way of propoſing and anſwering ſome *ſpecious Probabilities*, and of making their Converſations very eaſie as to matter of Opinions. They were ſufficiently conſcious that ſome of the Idolatries of the World were too *Groſs* and *Abſurd* to bear the Name of Religion, and too *Inhuman* to be practiſed by a civiliz'd People. Some *Popular* Worſhips they found it neceſſary to allow of, ſuch as might give Amuſement, and not prejudice the Commonwealth: They had ſubtile Diſtinctions and Evaſions for themſelves, and

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so the Multitude would be but quiet and governable, and not disturb their soft Tranquillity; They were content that many fanciful Rites and Dotages should prevail, and be established by their Laws.

It is easie to read this *Epicurean* Temper in the Behaviour of most of those *Roman* Magistrates, who were concerned in the Affairs of *Judea*; and their own Histories acquaint us that this was the Temper which then generally prevailed among their Great Men: Their main Business was Empire and Ease, they did not care to trouble themselves much about the Questions and Zeal of contending Parties, but suffered all Men to enjoy their particular Perswasions, so they raised no Tumults, and acted nothing contrary to the Interest of *Cæsar*. This was the Humour of the *Epicurean* Party, though others were of somewhat a warmer Temper.

Now St. *Paul*, who was not afraid of *Socrates* his Draught, spake such Truths before the Magistrates, and the most captious Sects, and in that City too, which was the Metropolis of all Idolatry, with that Freedom and Boldness as few of their wise Men, had they been able, would have ventured to have so publick-

ly own'd; who, though they were conſcious of ſome Truth, yet for the moſt part detain'd it in Unrighteouſneſs: But our Apoſtle, in an undaunted manner, declares unto them, the God of the *Jews*, the God, who made the World and All Things, the God, whom they themſelves did ignorantly Worſhip; to whom they had erected an Altar, though they had appointed no Sacrifice.

There were ſome few of the more Thinking Men, both among the *Athenians* and the *Romans*, who had gone a great way in diſcovering and confuting the Follies and Barbarities of the more monſtrous Sorts of Superſtition; they could, in a great meaſure, pull down the old Buildings, but knew not how to erect a new one; they were vigorous Oppoſers of ſome very palpable Falſhoods, but knew not where to find the Truth: Whereas St. *Paul* not only diſcovered the egregious Vanity of *Paganiſm*, but ſet before them the true and only Religion; the Worſhip of one God, *v.* 23. ſincere Repentance, *v.* 30. ſtedfaſt Belief of a Day of Judgment, and an expreſs and peculiar Faith in that Man whom God had ordain'd to Judge the whole World in Righteouſneſs, of which he had given a full aſſurance, and demonſtration,

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by raiſing him from the Dead, *verſe* 31.

Now, if we throughly conſider St. *Paul*'s Arguments againſt the Superſtitions of the *Athenians*, we ſhall find that they have a Foundation in *natural Religion*, but their main ſtrength and laſt Evidence is built upon *Revelation*: For he reaſons with them, That there is one God the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and all things therein; that nothing is more abſurd than to make any material Repreſentation of the Infinite Being: That Man is but an Off-ſpring of God, and if no Art can repreſent Man's Reaſon and Underſtanding by any Image in Gold, Silver or Stone, how much leſs can it figure out the Incomprehenſible Godhead, of which Man's Soul is but an imperfect Image? That God is not to be worſhipped with any Opinion of Indigency in him, as if he needed any thing, as they ſuppoſed their *Dæmons* did, who, as they fancied, were pleas'd, and, as it were, fed with the Steams of their Sacrifices; whereas he, who was Lord of Heaven and Earth, wanted nothing, and would be Worſhipped for our Advantage, not his own: That he was the Creator of all Mankind, having made of one Blood all Nations of Men. That his Providence was over all, in Suſtaining and Governing

verning all Things: That though he had permitted the ignorant World to try their own ways, yet now he commanded all Men to Repent: And to confirm the general apprehenſion they had of a Day of Judgment, and to make it a certain Principle of all their Deſigns and Actions, he appeals to *Revelation*; tells them of an Appointed Day, and of the very *Perſon* whom God had Ordain'd to Judge the World in Righteouſneſs; and leaſt they ſhould think that he intended to remove one Superſtition, only, to bring in another, he appeals to ſuch a Teſtimony, to ſuch a miraculous Confirmation, as God would never give to any thing but Truth, *viz.* to a Reſurrection from the Dead: The Truth of which, if he himſelf had not been ready to have Seal'd with his own Blood, he would never have ventur'd to Preach *Jeſus* and the *Reſurrection* in the midſt of *Athens*.

Now, having enlarged upon this Excellent and moſt weighty Speech, wherein St. *Paul*, with admirable Addreſs, reproved the *Athenians* for their Superſtition, and took an occaſion to inſinuate his own Doctrine with leſs Offence (for if they were ſo Hoſpitable to all Religions, why ſhould they be backward in giving Entertain-

Entertainment to his) and wherein he confutes the main Body of Heathenism by Natural Reason, of which they pretended to be the greatest Masters, and by the Authority of *Aratus*, an Astronomical Poet of high Repute amongst them; and lastly, wherein he not only confutes their Errors, but shews them the Truth; not by subtilty and human Methods, but by having recourse to the Revelation of God, and that testify'd, by the greatest of Miracles, the Resurrection of Christ from the Dead; having thus enlarg'd upon this Oration of St. *Paul*, which he made against the Superstition of the *Athenians*, in the midst of their great Court of Judicature, I shall endeavour these three Things in my following Discourse.

I. To lay down some Considerations that may lead us into a more distinct Knowledg of the Nature of Superstition.

II. To observe some of its more Barbarous Effects, such as the Occasion and the History of this Day shall suggest.

III. To propose some Directions to preserve us from this Horrible Sin, and the ill Consequences of it.

I. To

I. To lay down some Considerations, &c.

Superstition in its ordinary use, is made a word of Ambiguity, and a common Term of Disdain, which is mutually cast upon all the Differences in Religion. The *Epicureans* counted it Superstition to acknowledge the Providence of God, and to pay him any Worship besides the bare Esteem of the Mind. The Heathen Writers, whenever they mention the *Jews* or the *Christians*, speak of them as a most wretchedly-deluded People, given over to an obstinate Superstition: But I think the Primitive Fathers have sufficiently manifested where Superstition was to be really charg'd, by exposing their Absurd, Cruel and Obscene Rites, and by Baffling all the Arguments which they brought to justifie their Follies.

But still, there are vast Bodies of People in the World, who live under different Perswasions in Religion, as well as under different Governments; who are mightily satisfied in their own ways of Worship, and commiserate all who are not of their Opinion, as poor deluded Creatures blinded with Superstition. Nay, the Profession of Christianity it self, is so fill'd up with different Imaginations, Rites and Usages, that almost all distinct Communions

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are Impeaching and Abhorring one another, upon the account of Superstition.

They who know the World, know that these are true Observations, and very deplorable: But sure there is some better Standard of Superstition than the opprobrious Language and Passions of Mankind, and that is the thing I am now to enquire after.

1. Therefore, 'tis well known, that *Plutarch* has written the most celebrated Treatise on this Subject, of any among the Ancient Heathen; for that Book of *Seneca* concerning Superstition, which St. *Austin* quotes, is not come down to our Hands. Now, though this Grave and Ingenious Author has deliver'd many excellent Things on that Head, and shew'd an extraordinary Zeal against those who painted the Divinity in a Horrid Shape, that they might Worship their own *ill Nature*; yet when he defines Superstition by an *Astonishing* and *Dreadful Apprehension* of the *Deity*, he does not tell us the true *Nature* of it, but only points out one *Cause*, or one *Occasion* of it. For though Superstition may arise from Fear, yet it rises also from Ignorance, or a Stupidity of the Mind, from Love and Fondness, as well as from Fear, from almost any Passion of the Soul, and any Temper of the Body; for

when the Natural Sence of a Deity, and of the Duty that Man owes him, comes to be vitiated with a mixture of Mens own Infirmities and Paſſions, thoſe Infirmities and Paſſions ſtand ready to commence Superſtition; there being nothing more requir'd, but an Opinion of their being *well-pleaſing to God*, which is ſeldom wanting to Mens own Imaginations. Beſides, to call a Dread of God by the Name of Superſtition, is ſomewhat a dangerous Expreſſion to Chriſtian Ears, when we conſider how the *Old Teſtament* does almoſt every where repreſent Religion by the Fear of God; and that the Prophets convers'd with him under great Tremblings and Terror. *Plutarch* was a *Platoniſt*, and the *Platoniſts* were a Sect of People who were generally of a ſoft and Amorous Nature, who plac'd their Happineſs in the Speculation of Ideas; and who rarely conſider'd God, as a Righteous Puniſher of Sin, but chiefly as a moſt amiable Being for them to contemplate; they uſually entertain'd very good Opinions of themſelves, and of their own Perfections, and little thought of that Gulf which Sin had made between Man and the Divine Nature; and therefore they hardly allow'd ſuch a juſt Severity to the Deity, as was requiſite for the

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wise Government of the World, but made his Goodness to swallow up his Justice. Whereas God, who knows his own Nature best, has given us another Character of himself, *the Lord, Merciful and Gracious, and forgiving Iniquity; but will by no means clear the Guilty, visiting the Iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children,* Exod. 34. 6, 7. Superstition therefore, though variable in its Original and Effects, is always founded upon a false Apprehension of God, and consequently upon a false Apprehension of Religion, by which he is Serv'd and Worship'd: And as this false Apprehension of God and Religion arises from several Causes, and produces several Effects, so accordingly Superstition is varied; It consists both in Opinion and Practice; and though Practice be most Obvious and Remarkable, and that from which Opinion is usually gather'd; yet it may be defin'd, with a regard to both, *viz. That it is the Performing of a religious Service, with an Opinion of its being well-pleasing to God, though it be really unacceptable and unworthy to be offer'd to him.* So that our next Enquiry will be, to know what Religious Service is well-pleasing to God, and what is unacceptable to him.

I. Some have thought that the Manners and Customs of the Country, and the Pub-

lick Laws are the only Determination in this Matter: So *Seneca* is represented by St. *Austin*, for concluding that those Superstitions which he could not approve of to his own Mind, were yet to be observ'd, because the Laws commanded them: *Quæ omnia sapiens observabit, tanquam legibus jussa, non tanquam Diis grata*, C. D. l. 6. c. 10.

And not much unlike is, that which the Church of *Rome* Assigns, when she makes her Constitutions the only measure of what is, and what is not, Superstition.

But now this is a way of confounding all Truth, or of making it safe, as to Temporal Interest, for Men to practice the Superstitions of every Country, where they are publickly allowed; but this gives the Mind no Light, nor enables it to make a Rational and Certain Distinction between Religion and Superstition.

2. An Appeal to the Principles of Natural Religion, and to the Dictates of sound Morality, did go a great way among some of the wiser Heathen towards the Determination of this Thing; and therefore St. *Paul* insisted so much upon Natural Principles in his Speech to the *Athenians*, though he did not ultimately rest on those: Gross Idolatry could not stand before

fore the Light of Natural Reason, when it was well display'd; but yet there were many leſſer Extravagances from which the politer Heathen could not free themſelves by the ſtrength of that Principle. Thus *Cicero*, who was a great Maſter of Morality, and deeply ingag'd in all the Gallantry of Roman Vertue and Heroical Worth, made a ſhift, by the Sagacity of his Reaſon, and the Natural Probity of his Mind, to confute the more Abominable Opinions and Practices of the Superſtitious in his Time; whatſoever was Barbarous and Inhuman, whatſoever was Obſcene and Filthy, and Egregiouſly abſurd in the Gentile Worſhip, he perfectly deteſted, as directly contrary to the Benignity of God, to the Modeſty of Human Nature, to the Univerſal Love of Mankind, and the Foundation of all Society: But when he had work'd his Reaſon to ſome height, and had proceeded ſo far as to give a good blow to all Paganiſm, by his Rational and Searching Diſcourſes; yet, at laſt, he found it neceſſary to retain ſome Sacrifices, and ſome Ceremonies in the Worſhip of the Gods; for which he could give no other reaſon than the *Teſtimony* of the *Oracles*, and the *Tradition* of *Anceſters*. And this plainly ſhews, that there is no reſting in this Argument, till we come to

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Divine Revelation. We may, doubtleſs, go a great way towards the detecting of Superſtition by the ſtrength of that which Men call Natural Religion and Moral Principles, and the Eternal Reaſon of Things; for whatſoever is apparently repugnant to the Notion of the Godhead, to the Perfection of our own Nature, and to the beſt Conceptions of our Minds, can never be the whole, or any part of the true Worſhip of God: But though this be freely granted, yet I ſuppoſe that Man would be hard put to it, that ſhould undertake to prove that the Ceremonial Worſhip of the Ancient *Jews* was not Superſtition, and be allow'd no Arguments to prove this by, but ſuch as ariſe from the natural Notions of Things, and a ſuitableneſs to the Divine Nature: Had not God been pleaſed to Inſtitute that Worſhip Himſelf, and to give Authority to it, by a multitude of undeniable Miracles, we ſhould never have found any intrinſecal Goodneſs in it, by hearkning to our own Reaſon, or by contemplating the Divine Nature. So likewiſe, in reſpect to the two Sacraments of the Chriſtian Religion, what Congruity can we diſcover between thoſe material and ſenſible Ceremonies, and a pure and infinite Spirit? 'Tis true, they are admirably ſuited to the Worſhip of a *God Incarnate*, but then that

that is matter of Revelation, and is the thing I contend for; *viz.* That we can never boldly pronounce concerning what is true Religion, and what is Superſtition, till we fix our ſelves upon *Divine Revelation*: For though, as I have obſerv'd, ſome of the wiſer among the *Gentiles* were able, by Natural Reaſon, to diſcover ſome of the groſſer Parts of Superſtition, yet ſtill they themſelves were under the ſame Bondage, though in a leſs Degree; as ſome Madmen, who are leſs Raving, will oftentimes ſpeak with ſome Judgment and Compaſſion of the more Extravagant Madneſs of others, tho' all the while they too labour under the ſame Diſeaſe, but their Diſeaſe is not in ſo high a Ferment.

We muſt centre our ſelves therefore upon the Reveal'd Will of God in Matters of Religion, and not truſt too much to our own Reaſonings concerning the Divine Nature and Will, of which we ſhould have known ſomething, but very little, if God had not been pleaſed to diſcover himſelf to us in his holy Oracles: If Men ſhall go to make Religion, or any part of it out of their own Heads, they will certainly make a Superſtition of it: There is not ſo much as a purely *Natural* Religion in the fall'n State of Mankind; no Prayers or Praiſes,

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or any of those we call Natural Duties, are acceptable to God without an Expiation, and an Intercessor; and these Things depending on the Will of God, can be no otherwise known, than as he has revealed them. Wherefore true Religion is keeping close to the Revelation of God in all the Essentials, and in all the substantial Acts of Worship, and Superstition is a departing from it in any of these. All the use we have of Reason in the Business of Religion, is to lead us to Divine Relation, and then to assist us in finding out the true Sence and Meaning of what is there deliver'd; and when this is done, we are wholly to resign our selves to the Will of God, and to believe and do as he has Commanded.

To effect this, Reason may proceed in this Method, and by these Fundamental Maxims.

That God may reveal his Will to Mankind in a Supernatural and Extraordinary Manner: That he can make use of sufficient means to confirm his Revelations to us, and to enable us to distinguish between a true Revelation and a pretended one: That whatever God Reveals is infallibly true: That if we will make a sincere Use of our Faculties we may so far understand the

true

true Sense of whatever God has reveal'd relating to his Worship, as to distinguish his Mind from false Interpretations, and to be secure, that we have right Objects for our Faith, and true Rules and Measures for our Obedience. But then farther, 'tis as Rational a Conclusion, as any of the foregoing, that God can reveal more than we can fully comprehend; or, that he can discover to us such sublime Truths, as we may have sufficient Reason to believe, tho' we have not Capacities fully to conceive; and it is here especially, that our Reason is to stoop, and to yield to Faith; for our Understandings are finite, and not a proper Measure of all Divine Truth; and what is more to be insisted on, they have contracted many *Weaknesses*, and much Blindness in *Spiritual* things; and upon these Accounts, it becomes us to be exceeding cautious, lest we should take our Passions and our Prejudices, for plain and evident Reason.

By these steps, together with the Universal Tradition of those Miracles and Matters of Fact, which are Recorded in the Scriptures, a Man may arrive to a *Rational Faith*; and then he may securely pronounce, that

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there is but one *True Religion*, or acceptable Worſhip, which is the *Chriſtian*; and that all the reſt are Superſtitious, whether *Jewiſh*, *Pagan*, or *Mahometan*; for the *Jewiſh Religion*, as 'tis now profeſs'd in oppoſition to Chriſt, and as 'tis ſtuff'd with modern Dotages, is a poor, wretched Superſtition.

As to what concerns the charge of Superſtition among Chriſtians, it may now be diſpatch'd in few words: For I do not ſee, that it can with any manner of Truth, be apply'd to any viſible Public *Conſtitution*, but that of the Church of *Rome*; for I do not concern my ſelf at preſent, with the multitude of unformed Sects. It cannot conſiſt, either in the numerouſneſs or oddneſs of Ceremonies, when there is no Merit attributed to them, and they are not enjoin'd as Subſtantial Acts of Worſhip, or as parts of Holineſs, in themſelves well pleaſing to God.

As to Superſtition in Manners, or the bad uſe which ſome make of the Externals of Religion, that cannot be prevented by the moſt excellent Conſtitution of a Church, nor by the beſt Wiſdom of a Nation; for when People are averſe to real Goodneſs, they will try to go to Heaven by ſhifts, and place Perfection in Inſtrumental Piety; Theſe are abuſes

ſes which cannot be wholy prevented by any Publick Eſtabliſhment; but People muſt be call'd off from ſuch ſort of Superſtition, by frequent Admonitions, and by ſuch Sermons and Diſcourſes, as ſhall plainly ſhew, where in real and ſubſtantial Holineſs does conſiſt. Whereas the Church of *Rome*, has Eſtabliſh'd Superſtition by a *Law*, and made it the moſt Celebrated part of their Worſhip and Devotion. A great part of their Religion is founded upon ſome particulars, which they conjecture, muſt needs be Tranſacted by Souls departed, and in the behalf of Souls, as they are in a State of *Separation*, concerning which Revelation has left us in the dark; wherefore, that muſt neceſſarily be a very great Superſtition, which obliges People to receive ſuch practices, as parts of Divine Worſhip, which have nothing to ſupport them, but Man's Preſumption. The Worſhipping of Saints and Angels, is Superſtition in the principal Senſe of the Word, Δεισιδαιμονία, the Worſhip of Demons; notwithſtanding all the fine colours, by which their witty Men try to diſguiſe this practice; 'tis hard to propoſe any two things in the world, that run in ſo exact a parallel, as the

Worship of *Demons* among the *Gentiles*, and the Worship of *Saints* among the Papists, a Parallel, not forc'd and sought for, nor managg'd by fansie, but such as obtrudes it self upon the Observation, and offers it self to our first Reflections. Little did St. *Paul* think, when he made his admirable Speech against the Superstition of the *Athenians*, that he himself should one day be Worship'd as a sort of *Demon* in the Christian Church: But so it is, the Seducer has been too hard for those Christians, who would not stand to the plain Word of God, but would presume to make Additions to the main and principal part of all Revelation, the Doctrine of the Mediation of Christ: He has insinuated a most abominable Idolatry, which is the worst part of Superstition, under another dress; he has supply'd the Papists, with Angels and Saints, instead of Demons and Hero's, and has sent them *Jupiter* and *Mercury*, in the likeness of *Barnabas* and *Paul*.

Having laid down some Considerations, that may lead us into a more distinct Knowledge of the Nature of Superstition, I proceed in the

Second place, to observe some of its more barbarous

barbarous Effects, such as the present Occasion, and the History of this Day shall suggest.

Had we only the *Follies* and *Impieties* of Superstition to complain of, it were a Grievance worthy the Care and Wisdom of a Christian Nation to provide against; but when we consider, that nothing animates People more to *Sedition*, and to an abhorrence of all good Government, than Superstition; that it is the most fruitful parent of ignorant and bitter Zeal; that the most cruel Conspiracies, and most mischievous Designs are generally suggested by Superstitious Councils, and most commonly attempted by Men of Enthusiastick Tempers, emboldened by false Opinions in Religion; when we consider these things, and what a peculiar Malignity there is in all Superstition against the Civil Peace of Kingdoms, and the safety of Publick States; there seems to lye a *new Obligation* on the *Magistracy* to hinder the increase of that Distemper in Religion, which is so apt to turn into the *worst Plague* of Government, a *Rebellion upon pretence of Conscience*. *Tacitus* observes of the *Egyptians* of his time, that they would hardly obey any Magistrates, or

Hist. l. 1. s. 3.

hearken

hearken to any Laws, upon the account of their numerous Superſtitions. And the Hiſtory of our own Times may ſatisfie any reaſonable Perſon, that when ever People of ſuch Perſwaſions and Tempers ſhall be ſuffer'd to come to a Head, there will ſoon be an end of all juſt Authority: For what legal Reſtraint can be laid upon thoſe, who preſume themſelves actuated in all things by a Divine Impulſe, and that all the Murders they commit, are but ſo many Acceptable Sacrifices to God? and who will be ſure to throw off their Civil Subjection, as ſoon as ever it ſhall come into their Fancies, that God will help them againſt their Magiſtrates?

The Conſpiracy of this day is Evidence enough, what Cruel and Barbarous Deſigns Superſtition is always big with, tho', God be thank'd, it has not always ſtrength to bring forth: Nothing, it ſeems, could content thoſe Superſtitious Zealots, but the choiceſt Sacrifice, made up of the nobleſt Blood, and the Flower of Humane Nature gather'd into one body: And that there might be nothing to oppoſe their helliſh Deſign, they were reſolv'd not to give the blow, till all the Authority, Wiſdom, and Courage of the Nation were

were met in one August Assembly; but Providence, which presides over Kingdoms, is especially watchful over Parliaments, by which Kingdoms are best secur'd; and still continues a Succession of Them to withstand all Popish Counsels and Attempts, and to praise the Lord for that great Deliverance.

But seeing many are not apt to be so very sensibly affected with those Deliverances, which were conferr'd on the Generations before them; behold! this Day has been since enlarged with *new Mercies*, and therefore requires a double Gratitude from us. When the Men of the same Superstition had brought another horrible Design almost to effect, of undermining the Government, and of blowing up the Laws and Constitutions of this Kingdom and Church; even that was as miraculously prevented by a Divine and seasonable Interposal; and it must needs raise our Wonder and Joy, when we consider, who that Deliverer was, that Providence sent us: A Royal Prince out of that very Line, which was on this Day devoted to an utter Extinction: A Prince born so near this almost fatal Day, his Birth having an immediate priority to this Anniversary, that Heaven

ven thereby seems to assure us, that He has an Ascendant over all the Malignant Influences of Popish Sorcery; and that their Divinations shall never prevail against him; and that by his very Nativity, he is pointed out to be the Guardian of the Protestant Cause: And what is another remarkable Circumstance in our Deliverer, he is a Prince descended from that Noble Ancestor of his, who withstood the Tyranny and growing Monarchy of *Spain*, when she thought to have grasp'd all the Liberties of *Europe*; and having drank deep of the Cup of Fornications, had given her Power and her Strength unto the Beast.

These are Considerations that would tempt any Rational Man, tho' of no Prophetical Genius, to conclude, that doubtless, some greater Revolution than what we have yet experimented, is moving on; unless our Ingratitude stop it.

Besides, the Mercies that we have every Year Commemorated since that happy Revolution; we are still to bless God, that we have our Established Religion, and may serve him without a Slavish and Superstitious Fear. That our King is still Vigorous and

Active

Active, to watch and to withstand, a very Subtil, Powerful, and Implacable Enemy. Little do People think, what an instance it is of God's especial Goodness towards us, that we are not given over as a Prey unto his Teeth, that He can only Attempt and Threaten, and that His terrible fierceness is still bound up and restrain'd, tho' not confounded; That we have struck a hook into the Jaw of that Leviathan, by our late Victory at Sea, and hope, in a short time, to take an effectual care, that that *Leviathan* shall no longer take his Pastime in the deep. And tho' it be an *Amphibious* Creature that we have to deal with, whose greatest Strength lyes on the Land; yet by a prodigious Gallantry, of some of the Bravest Men that ever gave their Lives for their Country; He has been lately taught, that it would not be so hard for us to Conquer, if he had but Courage to give us one fair Battel.

'Tis not the Method of Divine Providence, to do all for us at once, but to try our Gratitude, by several instances of his goodness gradually dispens'd, and to mingle some Hardships with the Deliverances he sends us; to see whether we will repent and amend, and whether we are worthy of the continuance of his Favour.

If he finds by the daily increaſe of Wickedneſs amongſt us, that he ſhall not be Glorify'd by our Proſperity, he will change his Method of dealing with us, and be Glorify'd in our Oppreſſion. If we grow ſo nice, as to murmur at his proceedings, becauſe they do not exactly anſwer to all our Deſires; if we prove ſo unreaſonable, as to think we are undone, becauſe our Safety puts us to ſome Expences; and if our Condition appear miſerable, becauſe our Bleſſings are ſomewhat chargeable to us; then have we Reaſon to fear, leſt our Repining ſhould provoke God to make us Drink deeper of the Cup of Afflictions, before he gives us a farther Delivery.

The Miniſters of the Goſpel have been often put to make Apologies for the darker Providences of God; but the untoward Temper of this Age puts us upon making Apologies for his very Mercies too: Men have been ſo much us'd to Infidelity, that they will not believe their own Temporal Happineſs, if they can find the leaſt thing to object againſt it.

We all underſtand what Diſcontents there are in this Kingdom; (and can any of you remember, when this Nation was without its Com-

Complaints?) we know what ill Representations some are ready to make of every Management, and of every Event; we grant there are many difficulties under which we lye at present, and that the carrying on of so Necessary and so Diffusive a War, must needs be our burthen, as well as our Security; but none of these things must put a damp upon our Spirits, lessen our Gratitude to God, or check our forwardness in contributing largely towards the Maintaining of that Cause, in which the whole Protestant Interest is bottom'd; and in which his Majesty has been so Nobly seconded, by the concurrent Assistance, of a Wise, a Sensible, and a Generous Parliament.

III. I come in the last place, to lay down some Directions, to preserve us from the Horrible Sin of Superstition, which is one great occasion of all the Troubles of this Kingdom.

And here I beg leave, to recommend Three Things more especially.

1. The first is, a thorough insight into the Law of Nature, and the obligation of Moral Actions; an excellent piece of Wisdom, and brought to great Perfection in some late

Writings: The ſtudy of this, will render Mens Judgments ſound and maſculine, make them leſs lyable to Superſtitious Fancies, and conſequently leſs ſubject to Atheiſtical Conceits, which many runinto, by an Injudicious and too haſty abhorrence of the other. Make but a ſober Enquiry into the True Nature of Humane Actions, and that will quickly Teach you, to diſtinguiſh between Moral Duties, and Ritual Performances, and Barbarous Impieties, acted under the pretence of Religion; and to prefer Obedience, Righteouſneſs, Temperance, and Mercy, before the Sacrifice of Fools and Madmen; it will bring you to acknowledge, that your beſt Actions fall below your Rule, and then the Defects of Morality, will directly lead you to ſeek after an Expiation for thoſe Defects, and that Expiation is Chriſt our Saviour.

2. Do but take a ſerious view of the horrible Superſtitions of the Ancient and Modern Heathen, and you will quickly abhor all approaches towards ſuch Degeneracies from common Reaſon, and from the firſt Notions of Religion; and not indure that Chriſtianity ſhould have any of thoſe ſordid mixtures brought into it; which in time would make that

that Heavenly Institution an Instrument of the vilest practices in the World: For when once the Superstitious get a Head, there will be no stopping of them; they will rage in all manner of bloody and barbarous Effects; if the destruction of Cities, Families, Provinces, as very acceptable parts of Devotion; they will proceed, for all that I know, from Plots and Massacres, to worship God directly by Humane Sacrifices; from the attempting to blow up Parliaments, to the offering up their own Sons and Daughters unto Devils.

3. Do but peruse the History of the Church in its first and purest Ages, and you will wonder how that Grave Matron, the Christian Religion, came to put on such a meretricious Paint, as it appears with in the Church of *Rome*; how old plainness and Sincerity came to be so supplanted by Artifice and Fraud; how Goodness, Candor, Peaceableness, and lawful Subjection came to be run down by Fury and Rebellion, and horrid Conspiracies undertaken with Ceremonies of Religion; and how the most Solemn Worship of one God, thro' one Mediator, came to be turn'd almost into the Worship of one Pope, and all such Saints as he shall please to Canonize;

Canonize; either for their Holiness, or for their Villany.

2. For a general Direction to all Christians, who would not be ensnar'd by Superstition; I intreat them to stand to the Holy Scriptures, and to well season their Minds with a due sense of the Christian Religion from those Pure and Spiritual Discourses which our Saviour himself has left us: To consider, what are the especial Duties to which he has annexed his Blessings, and what is the Hypocrisie and Formal Worship he has most zealously oppos'd. 'Tis conversing much with the Holy Scriptures, that alone is able to make a Man Devout and Discreet at the same time; there is no such security against all Superstition, as a constant recourse to the Word of God, that Crystal Fountain of all Truth, Holiness, Wisdom, and Love; and when these Graces are well infus'd into our Hearts, nothing but what is solid in Religion will be able to make any strong Impression on our Souls.

To conclude, That which I am willing to leave very affecting and warm upon your Minds, is this, That I fear our little Differences in Politicks, have very much abated of that just

just abhorrence which is due to the Abominable Superstitions of the Church of *Rome*, and so the last Error may be worse than the first: But whatever miscarriages we mutually impute to each other, let us all assure our selves, that *Popery* is still the same Corruption of Christianity as before, and that there is no Alteration in the Opinions and Designs of that Church, whatever there may be in the Piety and Constancy of those who seem to slacken very much in their Opposition against it. Let us endeavour to behave our selves with that Moderation, that all Parties may come into the true Interest of the Nation, which is the preservation of the Protestant Religion; that all our Hearts may be united into the same general Policy and Wisdom; that our Divisions may be no longer a Reproach to our selves, and a Triumph to our Enemies: And, in a word, that Luxurious *Fasts*, Murmuring *Thanksgivings*, and false Professions of *Allegiance* may not be the ruin of this Church and Kingdom! If neither Judgments nor Mercies will do us any good; if we are of too perverse a Temper, either to be Humbled or Oblig'd, then our greatest Calamity is not remov'd, but only deferr'd;

but

but if we have Hearts truly thankful for former Deliverances, and have the Grace and Skill to manage a present Bleſſing, when 'tis put into our Hands, we may ſtill be a Proſperous and a Great People, and ſuch as the Lord ſhall delight to viſit with Mercies, Deliverances, and a mighty Salvation: *Which God of his Infinite Mercy grant us, thro' Jeſus Chriſt, his Son, our Lord.*

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghoſt, be all Honour, Glory, Power, Praiſe and Thankſgiving, now and for ever more. Amen.

FINIS.